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LEGAL ATTAINMENTS OF DOCTOR DIXON.

BY JOHN CADWALADER, LL.D.

DR. SAMUEL GIBSON DIXON was a man of such varied abilities and had exerted them to such an unusual degree in benefiting his fellow-men that all phases of his life present points of interest and justify the consideration of his career in its different periods.

In his very early years he exhibited such activity of mind and such earnestness of purpose that his father said of him that "there seemed to be no limitation to his development." When a man has been a successful lawyer, a doctor of medicine, filling an important chair in a leading medical school with high scientific attainments; for twenty-two years the President of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia, and in 1905 assuming as Commissioner the entire control of and practically creating the Health Department of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania under the continuous reappointments by four Governors, it may well be said of him that his life has been remarkable and well spent.

The Chairman has spoken and others will speak of his work for the Academy and for sanitary science. I have been asked to refer to those years during which he devoted himself to the law.

The law has been well called "A Jealous Mistress," requiring untiring attention. Dr. Dixon only entered on the threshold of a lawyer's life and, of course, had not reached the stage of distinction which only comes to men after years of experience. I am sure, however, that his study and limited time in practicing the profession had a distinct influence in his career.

The material growth of industries and commercial interests of all kinds has brought into such prominence the "Captains of Industry" and "Napoleons of Finance" that the great profession of the law is not appreciated as it was half a century ago and for centuries before that time. Lord Campbell, in dedicating his "Lives of the Chief Justices of England" to his son Dudley, wrote: "As you have chosen the noble though arduous profession of the law I dedicate these lives to you in the hope that they may stimulate in your bosom a laudable ambition to excel, and that they may teach you industry, energy, perseverance and self-denial," and "ever bear in mind that truly enviable reputation is only to be acquired by

independence of character, by political consistency and by spotless purity both in public and private life."

Dr. Dixon's early leaning was the study of chemistry and from that to medicine generally. His health, however, as he reached manhood was not good and he went to Europe, visiting Vienna in 1873 during the World's Exhibition held in that year. On his return, when about twenty-five years old, he entered the office of his brother, Edwin S. Dixon, and studied law with him and at the Law School of the University of Pennsylvania, being admitted to the Bar on June 30th, 1877.

It is of interest to recall the fact that Dr. Dixon's immediate predecessor as President of the Academy, Gen. Isaac J. Wistar, was also a man of varied pursuits and until the Civil War practiced law.

In 1886 Dr. Dixon received his degree of Doctor of Medicine from the University of Pennsylvania, so that his years at the Bar were not more than six. The importance of those years in rendering more useful his distinguished career in his later activities is not probably recognized by many.

The training in a lawyer's office before the system of acquiring knowledge of the law entirely in a school, as at present, was of great value. A student under a careful preceptor was guided in his reading and studies. He had the advantage of being able to apply his knowledge to the daily business of the office. Typewriters and stenographers and even office boys had not then been introduced, and all letters and papers were copied, notices were served and messages carried by the students. The student then not only acquired practical knowledge of the duties of a lawyer, but he became known to the members of the Bar and clients in a way that enabled him to gain their confidence if it was deserved.

In an office of general practice every kind of business and occupation and the method of being conducted have to be investigated. A lawyer should be an expert accountant and bookkeeper, with an insight into all commercial and manufacturing methods. Until title companies superseded the work of the *conveyancer*, I mean in the correct sense and not that of a *scrivener*, which is usually meant, the lawyer had to possess the closest familiarity with all the incidents connected with real estate and mortgages and the rights of inheritance. In these and many other fields the lawyer of fifty years ago was very truly *Une homme d'affairés*.

The profession of the law is more important in this country than

in any other, as we live under the written Constitutions of the State and the United States. It is extremely difficult for any man not trained in the law to comprehend his duties as a citizen. We all realize if a Legislature or Congress passes an Act that affects our interests we must consult a lawyer to ascertain how we are to meet its requirements. The recent income tax laws are in point. But very few think of the fundamental constitutional regulations that override and control all legislation. It is largely for these reasons that lawyers have been called upon to fill every class of executive duty. A few years ago a greater number of railroads were presided over by lawyers than by any other class of men, and the great trust companies and even banks seek lawyers as their presiding officers.

I have referred to these facts to apply them to the case of our late President. Short as his career was at the Bar, his keen clear intellect had grasped the main principles of the law and he had entered upon a successful professional life. Admitted in 1877, as early as January Term, 1878, his name appears in the Supreme Court Reports. The case referred to was one involving a nice point of law, and the opposing counsel was a leader of the Bar and one of the most distinguished men in the profession, the Hon. Peter McCall. The case was decided in favor of Dr. Dixon's clients, an important fact for a young advocate.

The office of Edwin S. Dixon and Samuel G. Dixon was noted for its accurate and careful attention to every case and matter submitted to it. In connection with cases involving real estate they were especially competent and met on equal terms the Nestors of that branch of the law at that time, Eli K. Price, Edward Olmstead, William Henry Rawle and Henry Wharton. These were the men at that date who practically controlled all transactions involving land titles. The details of a lawyer's practice are not of general interest, and I do not recall any incident in Dr. Dixon's years at the Bar requiring special mention. What he gained in those eight years of study and practice he never forgot, and those who have been associated with him on the Council of the Academy can all testify as to his clear insight and sound judgment on questions affecting its material interests as distinguished from the scientific work which demanded his greater attention.

Dr. Dixon fully appreciated all that Lord Campbell said of the legal profession and followed his precepts while a lawyer and in all of his other relations in life. He knew that to excel "industry, energy, perseverance and self-denial" were essential. The envia-

ble reputation he secured could not have been acquired without "independence of character and by spotless purity in public and private life."

The interesting home owned and lived in for six generations of his mother's family called "Waverly," where he was born, still belongs to them. Adjoining Bartram's Gardens the three hundred acres reached the Schuylkill River, where, from their own wharf, they shipped the farm products and caught the shad in the spring, justly prized from those waters. The city's growth has destroyed these advantages which the earlier generations enjoyed, but it is rare that any home in this country remains in the possession of the sixth generation of any family.

Interesting as was his early home, his late residence, near the romantic Mill Creek and overlooking the beautiful hills beyond Ardmore with the rare trees and shrubbery and attractive farm land, was one in which he might have passed his latter days in the truest enjoyment. He gave himself no rest, however, and even the hottest days of summer were spent at Harrisburg in the strenuous performance of his great work of protecting the people of his State from the scourge of disease.

Dr. Dixon was essentially a Philadelphian. He possessed that modesty and freedom from the desire for notoriety or personal distinction which has marked so many of the great men of our city and State. This building, in which is now safely housed the invaluable collections which he and his predecessors have obtained and his work in securing pure air and preserving the waters of the State from pollution, are far greater monuments than any column that could be erected in his memory. A plain tablet recording his name, but not his deeds, as in the case of Franklin, is all that is necessary. Dr. Dixon's monuments at least cannot be overlooked.

My warm friendship for Dr. Dixon renders it a pleasure to contribute in any way to the respect which is owed to his memory, and as a lawyer to record the fact of his having been one of that brotherhood.